Written by MARK JAEGER
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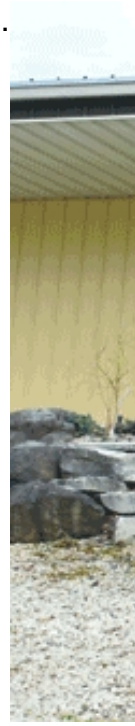
Fransee says its still too early to plant flowers, but plenty can be accomplished

Spring fever has reached epidemic proportions at Fransee & Son Garden Center in Saukville and just about any other area business that caters to gardeners.

The early surge of warm, dry weather has lots of people itching to sink their fingers into the soil.



“It has been great. Our phone has been ringing off the hook, especially during the weekends,” said Gene Fransee, owner of the garden center.

After a week of temperatures in the 60s and 70s, some customers seem oblivious to the calendar and are often surprised when told that garden stock isn’t available yet.

Greenhouse flowers won’t arrive at the center, 3670 Hwy. O, until the end of March. By April, nursery plants will be available to purchase.

Although the center’s neon “open” sign is lit, there are no plants lined up in the front of the building and the showroom is mostly empty.

Fransee said many people are fooled by the fact that perennial flowers like crocuses and daffodils have already begun to show their colors in area flower beds, taking that as a sign it is time to start digging.

“It is still too early to be thinking about planting flowers around here. It has been so beautiful

people forget that last year March was just cold and nasty," he said.

With 66 years of experience in the gardening business, Fransee warned that harsh weather — including hard freezes and heavy snows — are meteorological possibilities for at least another month. Those remnants of winter can kill delicate blooms, making early planting ill-advised.

Home gardeners should take their cues from farmers, he said.

"The ground is pretty dry, in fact we could use a good soaking rain, but you don't see farmers out planting in the fields yet. But I know the farmers are itching to work up the ground, so it won't be long," Fransee said.

However, he said, there is no need for gardening fanatics to sit by idly watching the pages of the calendar slowly turn.

"Absolutely there are things people can be doing. You can clean up the debris that has collected in your garden over the winter and you can put down some new mulch," Fransee said.

He said early fertilizing can be done now.

"If you get the fertilizer down now, when the spring rain does come, the lawn should green up nicely," Fransee said.

Early spring is an ideal time to plant new trees, he said, and a number of balled root trees have been sold at the center.

People have also been calling to make reservations for landscaping work, which Fransee said is a sign people are thinking spring.

He said the willingness to embrace the change of seasons may have a deeper meaning than plants growing from the cold dirt.

"I think people are looking for something to get excited about again. There is so much negativity around in politics and the economy. The arrival of spring and a new growing season are a reasons to take a positive attitude," Fransee said.

"We're ready for change. I think that optimistic outlook is why I've been in this business all my life."

Image Information: IT IS STILL too early to plant flowers, but the crew at Fransee & Son Nursery is preparing tree stock for sale. Above, (from left) Gene Fransee, Tom Kulich and Joe Fransee move an autumn purple ash tree to the display area in front of the Saukville garden center. At left, a flowering dogwood is already blossoming near the store's sign. Photos by Mark Jaeger